

# Educational Contribution of Savitribai Phule in 21<sup>st</sup> Century India

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## ABSTRACT

The present study aims to know feminist Savitribai Phule's contribution to education and women's education in the 21st century. Savitribai Phule's ideas and values should be incorporated in education because she initiated a wave of revolution in the contemporary period of various aspects of education. She tried to break the conventional education system that was prevailed in the society and wanted to reconstruct it as an open and universal education system of all. This study is a qualitative approach associated with the historical study method. The method of historical study is adopted by the researcher to conduct his study. In this study, both primary and secondary data have been used. Her principles and values are acceptable in the general education system. These views should be incorporated into the present education system. This is will enrich the knowledge of the Indian education system. Teachers and Students will follow the way shown by Savitribai Phule and make the education system acceptable for all strata of the society and aware everyone to rise above discrimination. In this way, present education will be more fruitful and will also help to keep the value and relevance at various levels.

**KEYWORDS:** Feminist, Pragmatic View, Women Education, 21st Century, Social Reformer and Revolutionary

## INTRODUCTION

The glorious history of India has undergone transgression in the past three thousand years and moved toward a more rigid culture. This phenomenal change undeniably began within the family and has been maintained a complex combination of custom, functionality and religious belief. Every aspect of life has a wave of heyday and doomsday in those bygone years but the education of women remained silent oppression in the historicity of great India. Indian society exhibits submissive behavior, lack of social awareness, inhuman approach towards casteism, untouchability, child exploitation, corruption and issues about reservation policies, religious discrepancy and power imbalance leading to social discrimination. The oppression in Indian society manifests passivity in society and hence the need to create human awareness to deal with societal problems and bring equality with social change. Many renounce historians have articulated such barbarity as a major drawback of India's backwardness. Today Indian women are not behind men in any respect. They made their names in history and ruling the hearts of many people because of their education and wisdom. They have proved themselves in each and every field like education, politics, sports, science. Medical, engineering, government sectors and social service etc.

Savitribai Jyotirao Phule was a prominent Indian social reformer, educationist and poet who played an instrumental role in women's education and empowerment during the nineteenth century. Savitribai Phule was born on January 3, 1831, in the village of Naigaon in Satara District,

Maharashtra. Her birthplace was about five kilometers from Shirval and about 50 kilometers from Pune. Savitribai Phule was the eldest daughter of Lakshmi and Khandoji Neveshe Patil, both of whom belonged to the Mali Community. At the age of 10, Savitribai Phule was married to Jyotirao Phule, born on the 11th of April 1827. At the time of their marriage, he was thirteen years old. Savitribai and Jyotirao had no children of their own, but they adopted Yashawantrao, a son born to a Brahmin widow. At the time of her marriage, Savitribai Phule had not been educated because Brahmins forbade it for people of her low caste and gender. Counted among few literate women of those times, Savitribai is credited for founding the first girl's school in Pune in Bhide Wada with her husband Jyotirao Phule. She took great effort towards educating and emancipating child widows, campaigned against child marriage and sati pratha, and advocated for widow remarriage. A leading figure of Maharashtra's social reform movement, she is considered an icon of Dalit Mang caste just likes B. R. Ambedkar and Annabhau Sathe. She campaigned against untouchability and worked actively in abolishing caste and gender-based discrimination. Savitribai Phule was one of the most important personalities who contributed considerably in adding glory to the mission of the modern Indian social scenario. She was the first woman teacher, the first woman educationist, who inspired the downtrodden people to take up education and thereby played an important role in their emancipation. She also conducted many activities in various social fields. Barring a few exceptions, Savitribai Phule fails

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to find any mention in the history of modern India. Her life and struggle deserve to be appreciated by a wider spectrum and need to be known among all the Indians.

#### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM:

The Problem is "Educational Contribution of Savitribai Phule in 21st Century India". Educational Thoughts of Savitribai Phule and relevance her educational idea in the present century in Indian Education.

#### RELATED STUDIES:

- **Thom Wolf & Suzana Andrade (2008)**, published in 'Oikos Worldviews Journal' of "Savitribai and India's Conversation on Education". As stated here, "You owe her. But do you know her? Savitribai Phule, the Mother of modern education.
- **Thom Wolf (2011)**, published of Journal on "Comenius And Savitribai Phule". In this journal, he discussed changing education: a note on the "original and unusual" worldvoice, worldview, and worldvenue of Jan Comenius and Savitribai Phule.
- **Dipongpou Kamei (2013)**, had study "Women and Education: Contribution of Savitribai Phule and Pandita Ramabai for Women Education in India".
- **Suchismita Pai (2013)**, in her study "Savitribai, The Mother of Modern Girls' Education in India". She discussed in her study, Savitribai Phule may not be as famous as Mahatma Gandhi or Swami Vivekananda.
- **Goure (2016)**, Published International Journal of Management and Social Sciences, on "Feminist Philosophical Thought in Colonial India". In this small work, he would like to focus on the feminist philosophical aspect of Savitribai Phule's thought.
- **Kiran Agawane (2016)**, had study "Krantijyoti Savitribai Jotirao Phule: Liberating Women and Lower Castes". This study focused on liberating women and lower castes in India in the 19th century, Maharashtra.
- **Tata Sivaih (2017)**, name of the study "Great Bahujan Revolutionary Woman Krantijyoti Savitribai Phule". He mentioned here, Savitribai Phule a true feminist who worked towards abolishing discrimination and unfair treatment of people based on Religion, Caste, Race and Gender.
- **Shikha Sharma (2017)**, had studied "discuss what the amazing Savitribai Phule did a century ago is followed by schools even today." This study focused on various amazing and great works of Savitribai Phule.
- **Patel (2017)**, work on "Contribution of Savitribai Jyotirao Phule in Education Field". He mentioned here, Savitribai Phule was one of the most important personalities who contributed considerably in adding glory to the mission of the modern Indian social scenario.
- **Bhai (2017)**, work on "Contesting Patriarchy and Caste: A Case Study of Savitri Bai Phule". This essay explores the subjectivity and agency of a woman in Western India who relentlessly fought against patriarchy and the caste system.
- **Katke (2019)**, had studied "Savitribai Phule Contribution towards Indian Social Elements – A Study" Savitribai Jyotirao Phule was a prominent Indian social

reformer, educationist and poet who played an instrumental role in women education and empowerment during the nineteenth century.

- **Waghmare (2020)**, made the work on "Savitribai Phule: Women Empowerment in India". This work focus on Women's Education and Empowerment. One of the world's great puzzles that women, who make up half the world's population, have been so much discriminated against throughout history.

#### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The objectives of this study are to-

- To study the feminist ideology and pragmatic view of Savitribai Phule.
- To analyze, Savitribai Phule as a social reformer and revolutionary.
- To know the contribution of Savitribai Phule on education in the 21st century.
- To know the contribution of Savitribai Phule women's education in the 21st century.

#### METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY:

This study is a qualitative approach associated with the historical study method. In this study, both primary and secondary data have been used by the researcher. The primary sources were the poems, essays, writings etc. written by the Savitribai Phule. The secondary sources are thesis, published journals, articles, magazines, books on Savitribai Phule.

#### DEFINED IMPORTANT TERMS:

**Feminist:** Savitribai Phule was the first Indian feminist. Feminism is the ideology that belief in and advocacy of the social, economic and political equality of the sexes expressed especially through organized activity on behalf of women's rights and interests.

**Pragmatic View:** Phule was a believer in a pragmatic vision. Pragmatism is a philosophical movement that includes and tradition that the meaning of a proposition is to be found in the practical consequences of accepting it, and that impractical ideas are to be rejected.

**Social reformer & Revolutionary:** Savitribai Phule played an important role as a social reformer and revolutionary. A reform movement is distinguished from more radical social movements such as revolutionary movements which rejecting those old ideas and building new ideas.

**21st Century.** It is a current century in the common Era. 21st Century education is the accumulation of knowledge, work habits and software skills of human experience. It including digital literacy, critical thinking and problem solving, that help students lead successful human being in society.

#### ANALYSIS AND DISCUSS THE OBJECTIVES:

##### Savitribai's Feminist Ideology and Pragmatic Views toward Education

**Feminist Ideology:** Savitribai Phule started several initiatives for social transformation much before the early nationalists took up social reform as a campaign strategy. One of the main focuses of her interventions was the challenge she posed to the well-established patriarchal and Brahmanical relations especially in terms of combating female illiteracy and the caste system. Savitribai and Jyotirao Phule are the pioneers for their numerous attempts among Stree- Shudra- Atishudra such as throwing open their doors

of learning to 'women and lower castes', opening drinking water well to the untouchables, throwing upon their home to the child widows and orphan children. The report says that 'The prejudice against teaching girls to read and write began to give way the good conduct and honesty of the peons in conveying the girls to and from school and parental treatment and indulgent attention of the teachers made the girls love the schools and literally run to them with alacrity and joy. Savitribai Phule fought against injustice against women at a time when women were subjected to oppression. She is known for her contribution to women's education in India, including the construction of the first school for women. For all of these special works, she has been called a feminist. In fact, many call her modern Indian's first feminist. This view of her is known to us as the feminist. The first modern Indian feminists who stood up for the rights of women and also fought against window shaving their heads.

**Pragmatic Views:** According to Plule- education was not simply alphabetical learning. It was not only gaining knowledge and getting degrees. Her thought was that everyone should get an education through the free mind and free thought. She used to say that education is one of the basic needs like food, shelter and clothing. She realized the main reason for the backwardness of people which was none other than education. So, she looks towards the problem of educational upliftment of the masses as a pragmatist. She believed that an industrial department should be attached to the schools where children could learn useful trades and crafts and be able to manage their lives comfortably and independently. She took the initiative to reduce malnutrition in children by taking care of the health of each and every child in school. She is also said to have inspired a young student to ask for a library for the school at an award ceremony instead of gifts for herself. She inspired young girls to take up painting, writing, and other activities. She used to teach in simple language. Mostly participative and activity-based teaching methods she used in her teaching.

#### **Contribution as a Social Reformer and Revolutionary**

Savitribai not only worked as an educational reformer but also worked as a social reformer. 19th century India was very backward with the caste system taking ugly forms. Untouchability and Sati system were still in practice, and illiteracy was very high. Education was denied to the women, and lower caste society. They were treated as chattels, providing domestic, economic and sexual labour in their family surroundings. There was no public role for them in society. They were not allowed to express their opinion or come together in society. They were not given any education and had to follow strict decorum in their homes. Child marriages were a norm and widows were banished from society and had little rights. It was a male-dominated society and women were treated as second-class citizens. It is obvious that 19th century India was not women's age it is supposed to be the 'dark age' for them. In that contemporary situation, her contribution as a social reformer is quite significant. Her various social activities are mentioned below-

#### **Social work**

1. Opened First Women School- 1848
2. Native Female School- 1850 (with husband)
3. The Society for Promoting the Education of Mahars, Mangs and Etceteras- 1850 (with husband)
4. Mahila Seva Mandal- 1852

5. Started India's First Infanticide Prohibition Home-1853
6. Started Night School- 1855
7. Satya Shodhak Samaj- 1873 (with husband)
8. First Satyashodhak marriage- 1873

#### **Publication**

1. Kavyaphule - 1854, poetry
2. JotibanchiBhashne-25 December 1856, Edited lecture of Jotirao Phule
3. Letters of Jotirao Phule- 10- 10 1856, 29- 08- 1868, 20- 04- 1877
4. Bavan Kashi Subodh Ratnakar (1891)

**As a Crusader for Gender Justice:** Savitribai Phule was one of the great crusaders of gender justice. She was the first Indian woman teacher and the first Indian to revolutionize Indian education by opening it up to girls and low-caste children. She was the first Indian to place universal, child-sensitive, intellectually critical, and socially reforming education at the very core of the agenda for all children in India. Savitribai Phule worked in tandem with her husband in the latter's efforts in eradicating the custom of untouchability and the caste system, garnering equal rights for people of lower castes, and reform of the Hindu family life. The couple opened a well in their house for the untouchables during an era when the shadow of an untouchable was regarded as impure and people were reluctant to even offer water to the thirsty untouchables.

**Involving Parents from the Dalit Bahujan Community:** Involving parents in their child's education has been one of the mainstays of the current Delhi government, that has also been organizing mass parent-teacher meetings and reading fairs and melas in all Delhi government schools – much like Phule did more than a century ago. To involve parents from the Dalit Bahujan community in the process of their children's education, Phule also initiated regular parent-teacher meetings in her school and events like fairs and pilgrimages and caste panchayats in the community

**Establishing the Satyashodhak Samaj:** When Jotiba Phule established (1873) the Satya Shodhak Samaj, Savitribai became the head of the women's section which included ninety female members. Its purpose was to liberate the Shudra and Untouchable castes from exploitation and oppression. One of the key initiatives of Satya Shodhak Samaj was Satyashodhak marriage. The first Satyashodhak marriage took place on December 25, 1873, between Sitaram Jabaji Ahata and Radha Nimbkar. Savitribai shouldered the expenses for this wedding.

**Started Mahila Seva Mandal:** Savitribai Phule started Mahila Seva Mandal in 1852, which worked for raising women's consciousness about their human rights, the dignity of life and other social issues. She went on to organize a successful barber strike in Mumbai and Pune against the prevailing practice of shaving of widows' heads.

**Opened India's First Infanticide Prohibition Home:** On 28<sup>th</sup> January 1853, Savitribai started a shelter for such women Infanticide Prohibition Home-the first of its kind in India. In this Infanticide Prohibition Home, widows could give birth to their children and leave them there. Due to the Brahminical Social Order, those were the days when women irrespective of their caste and class were very much oppressed in all fields of life. There were many patriarchal and Brahminical traditions, values and rituals which were against women.



## Contribution of Savitribai Phule on Education in 21st Century

**As a Mother of Modern Education:** Today in India we found a woman in each and every field. They walk freely, talk freely, participate in social activities because initially Savitribai Phule struggled, criticized a lot in past. She not only fought for the right education for girls but also for the right to dignity for widows, unwed mothers and women with unwanted pregnancies. She understood the importance of women's education, even she understood the importance of knowing English. In spite of continuous harassment, she did not stop with her efforts. Many revolutions took place in the world like the agricultural revolution, industrial revolution, information revolution, bio revolution but all these revolutions could not end the problems and sufferings of the human being. She worked for the women when women were objects to be used, education for them was considered a crime. She spoke against all boundaries because she was the woman of modern thoughts. She ignited many lives for which today's women should be grateful. Today's women tasting the fruit of that tree of education which was planted and nourished by Savitribai Phule. Education for her was not only literacy or knowing the words but for her education was igniting the minds and personality of everyone. In today's education Right to Education act, Mid-day meal scheme, Earn and learn scheme are new concepts. But Savitribai Phule used all these concepts in her education. She used to give a stipend to students to prevent them from drop out of school. She motivated students to ask for a library rather than giving gifts to her. She used to conduct the parent-teachers meeting at regular intervals so parents can understand the importance of education and they can motivate their children for education. She was very well aware about the relation between education and malnutrition so she used to provide a meal to students as well.

**As a Role of Educational Transformer:** In the age when women were confined to their kitchen and children, Savitribai laid down the foundation for women's education and women's empowerment. Society was rigidly based on caste, religion and gender separation. On 1st January 1848, she started the first school for girls in Bhide Wada. Savitribai provided slates and pencils to the girls. This led to the beginning of girls' education and these girls would uplift women in the future by spreading education. She worked to make the students have self-confidence. She struggled very hard to sustain this movement. Within a few years, Savitribai and Jyotirao started 18 new schools. The British rulers felicitated the Phule duo in 1852 by Major Kady for their contribution to the field of education. The British government also announced grants for their schools. Savitri Bai said, "Work hard, study well, and do good" she constantly underscored the importance of education and physical work for knowledge and prosperity. She felt that women must receive an education as they were in no way inferior to men; they were not the slaves of men. Savitri Bai Phule emphasized that education is the key to self-reliance and further to social reform.

**Formation Night School:** In 1855, a night school for agriculturists and labourers was started by the Phule couple. Many downtrodden people had no option to go to regular schools but could themselves available only at night so to cater their needs Phule couples started the night school.

**Organization of RTE and Mid-day Meal Schemes:** You might wonder about the Right to Education Act, midday meal schemes are a modern-day concept but Savitribai Phule and Jotiba Phule set the stage for it almost 170 years back by giving stipends to children to reduce the dropout rate in schools. They took initiatives to reduce malnutrition in children by taking care of the health of each and every child in school. They introduced the RTE and Mid-day Meal Schemes in 1850.

**Manifesting and Inspiring Students:** Savitribai Phule is also said to have inspired a young student to ask for a library for the school at an award ceremony instead of gifts for herself. She inspired the young girls to take up painting, writing, and other activities. An essay written by a young girl, Mukta Salve, at that time became the face of Dalit literature and Dalit Feminism. Parent-teacher meeting was conducted at regular intervals to aware the parents about the importance of education and to encourage their children to attend the schools regularly.

**First School for Shudra and Ati-Shudra:** Savitribai Phule and Jotiba Phule started school in 1849 for adults at Usman Sheikh's Wada in Pune for educating Shudra and Ati-Shudra community. Savitribai taught at this school along with the first Muslim woman teacher of India, Fatima Sheikh. They both successfully carried out this.

## Contribution of Savitribai Phule Women Education in 21st Century

**As a Pioneer of Women Education:** Savitribai Phule who had taken an initiative to start women education in India. She started the first women school exclusively for girls in India at that time when no one could think about educating a girl. At that time many social issues were there. Women were not allowed to take education; widows were not allowed to remarry. Their heads were shaven and they were forced to live an ascetic life. She decided to stop all these practices. Women were living a miserable life. She thought that only education could bring some good change in their life. She opened the first school for girls in 1848 with the help of Jyotiba Phule. Initially, only 9 girls took admission but all of them were from different castes. She had taken revolutionary steps to educate women which were not liked by orthodox society.

**Role of Women Empowerment in Society:** Jyotirao and Savitribai started schools for children from the Mang and Mahar castes, who were regarded as untouchables. Three Phule schools were in operation in 1852. This year she also started the Mahila Seva Mandal to create awareness among women regarding their rights, dignity and other social issues. In 1863, Jyotirao and Savitribai also started a care center called 'Balhatya Pratibandhak Griha,' possibly the first-ever infanticide prohibition home founded in India. It was set up so that pregnant Brahmin widows and rape victims can deliver their children in a safe and secure place thus preventing the killing of widows as well as reducing the rate of infanticide. Savitribai worked tirelessly against social evils like child marriage and sati pratha, two of the most sensitive social issues that were gradually weakening the very existence of women. She also made effort in bringing the child widows into the mainstream by educating and empowering them and advocated for their re-marriage. Such pursuits also met with strong resistance from the conservative upper caste society.

**As a Fighter Woman Liberator:** Savitribai Phule was the first Indian woman who fought against the oppression of women, dalits and religious minorities. She strongly believed that education can liberate women from oppressive patriarchal structures. To make the people aware of her devoted work towards society. Mountain Peak Publishers published a book in 2008 by the name 'Forgotten Liberator -- The Life and Struggle of Savitribai Phule'. She is one of the much-devoted persons who fought against the totalitarianism of caste and social evils in India. She declared war against casteism and Brahminic caste culture.

**Contribution to Women's Rights in India:** A leading social reformer Savitribai Phule is hailed for her contribution in the field of education. Savitribai was a crusader for women's empowerment as she broke all stereotypes and spent her life promoting the noble cause of women's education. She first modern Indian feminist who stood up for the rights of women and also fought against window shaving their heads. Savitribai Phule has made education the biggest weapon of freedom from slavery.

**Establish the First Women's School:** After completing her studies, Savitribai Phule opened her first school in Bhide Wada at Pune for girls on 1 January 1848 and was the youngest female school teacher of modern India, at the age of 17 years. Savitribai began handling the school administration as a headmistress. If these documents are to be given consideration, Savitribai Phule may well have been the first Indian woman teacher and headmistress. Her stepping across the threshold of the home to teach marks the beginning of the 'public life of the modern Indian woman. Initially, nine girls of different castes were enrolled as students. The school was open to girls from all sections of society. Girls from different religions, castes, and socio-economic backgrounds would come to study. However, the school was temporarily closed due to a shortage of funds.

**Social Prosperity, Awareness and Responsibility:** Today women have realized their strength in the 21st century and created their own identity in this world. They need to know that how to fight Savitribai for her rights in society and how to fight against injustice. She is walking shoulder to shoulder with men intellectually. She broke the boundaries of traditional social life and brought women into the light and sound of education, as well as making them aware of the responsibilities and duties in civil society. The Mahila Seva Mandal, formed in 1852, has been one of the organizations that have successfully carried out her ideas. Women are trying to throw away traditions and the beliefs that girls have to look after the kitchen and children after marriage and are firm that education is very important. The women have become more self-reliant by taking the required education. They are creating their own positions not only at home but also abroad. The present-day modern Indian women have no idea about the contributions of Savitribai as a liberator from an unjust system. Everyone should know how Savitribai Phule plays an important role in Women's, Prosperity, Social Awareness and Responsibility.

#### SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:

This study is very important and relevant in the present education system. So Savitribai Phule's ideas and values should be incorporated in education because she initiated a wave of revolution in the contemporary period of various aspects of education. She tried to break the conventional

education system that was prevailed in the society and wanted to reconstruct it as an open and universal education system of all. Another important aspect of this research is to inform all about the philosophy and feminist ideology of Savitribai Phule. It is amusing how she expressed and established her ideas in the contemporary situation. It is difficult to imagine for present-day women to think of the world that existed at that time. Her contribution in removing the superstitions and developing the woman education system is unignorable. Her principles and values are acceptable in the general education system. She showed the way to bring marginalized people into the mainstream of society. Savitribai is an Indian icon who realized the true meaning of women's rights like the Right to Life and Personal Liberty as stated in Article 21 and the Right to Education given by the Indian Constitution. In this millennium, women are playing an increasingly important role in the development of society. We must prepare them for that role by giving them equal education opportunities. Today, every educated Indian woman owes a debt of gratitude to Savitribai Phule, often referred to as the mother of modern girls' education.

#### CONCLUSION:

Savitribai Phule is a different character in different fields of education. Although married at a very young age, she did not live in the darkness of illiteracy. She was a signatory as well as showing the direction of literacy of the society. Her husband gave her courage behind all her actions. She and her husband were jointly involved in the spread of social work and education. A review of her various activities shows that she was involved in the spread of education for almost her entire life. Philosophical ideology is a significant feature of any great person. Savitribai Phule has been called an Indian feminist in the light of her philosophical thinking. She was vocal about women's freedom, women's socio-economic status, access to education, right to education, etc. Her contribution to various aspects of general education at that time and in the present time as well as in the 21st century can be seen. She has contributed to the elimination of gender inequality in education, equal rights, and the modernization of education, from the establishment of schools. The way she jumped into the spread of education despite being a married and worldly wife is truly incomparable. The Women's Education movement and the spread of women's education are the main part of her activities. That is why she has been called an Indian feminist. From the establishment of the first women's school to women's liberation, women's education, women's socio-economic status in all fields, her contribution is noteworthy. As a result of her women's education movement, a long change can be noticed in society. As a result, the rate of female education in the present society is increasing rapidly. Therefore, judging from all aspects, it can be said that not only the society and education system of that time, but also the present education system and her contribution in the 21st century is relevant. Therefore, various aspects related to her education need to be included in the curriculum. She is still revered and remembered today for her educational contributions.

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